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ABSTRACT

What is the political significance of humanitarian activist engagements with the discarded belongings of migrants? This article explores how bordering practices between states resonate with bordering practices between the human and non-human. It argues that attempts to transform 'desert/ed trash' into objects of value are nothing less than struggles over the very category of 'the human' itself. Focusing on humanitarian engagements with the objects that migrants leave behind across the Mexico-US Sonoran desert, it explores how the politics of human mobility involves the co-constitution of 'people', 'places' and 'things' in multiple ways. By contrast to a posthumanist analysis that emphasises the agency of material things based on a distinction between the human and the nonhuman, I draw on the work of Karen Barad in order to develop a 'more-than-human' account of the materialdiscursive un/becomings of subjects-objects-environments as more or less 'human'. This allows for an analysis of 'the human' as a political stake that is produced through struggles to de/value people, places and things, and that is thus subject to contestation as well as to processes of de- and re-composition. The article assesses the various ways that humanitarian engagements contest processes of dehumanisation through the re-configuration of 'desert/ed trash'. Rather than emphasising re-humanisation, however, I highlight the importance of analysis and practice that rejects the lure of 'naïve humanism' and the problematic over- and under-investments of migrant and human agency that such an approach involves. This is important, the article concludes, in order that the multiplicity of ways by which 'the human' is made, unmade and remade is accounted for without assuming either the supremacy or the powerlessness of people.

Keywords: Posthumanism, humanitarianism, borders, migration, materiality

What is the political significance of humanitarian activist engagements with the discarded belongings of migrants? This article explores how bordering practices between states resonate with bordering practices between the human and non-human. It argues that attempts to transform 'desert/ed trash' into objects of value are nothing less than struggles over the very category of 'the human' itself. Focusing on humanitarian engagements with the objects that migrants leave behind across the Mexico-US Sonoran desert, it explores how the politics of human mobility involves the co-constitution of 'people', 'places' and 'things' in multiple ways. By contrast to a posthumanist analysis that emphasises the agency of material things based on a distinction between the human and the nonhuman, I draw on the work of Karen Barad in order to develop a 'more-than-human' account of the materialdiscursive un/becomings of subjects-objects-environments as more or less 'human'. This allows for an analysis of 'the human' as a political stake that is produced through struggles to de/value people, places and things, and that is thus always subject to contestation as well as to de- and re-composition.

The human/nonhuman distinction can be understood from a Baradian perspective as the product of an observational 'cut' through which human subjects and nonhuman objects are produced out of complex intra-acting material-discursive (hereafter materialdiscursive) elements. Barad's neologism 'intra-action' reconfigures the concept of interaction in order to emphasise the inseparability of the various discursive and material elements that lead to particular materialdiscursive configurations of the world (Barad, 2003). Thus, on a Baradian reading, 'the human' is conceived as a product of the world in its "open-ended becoming", rather than as a pre-given category (Ibid: 821; see also Squire forthcoming a). In other words, Barad suggests that people neither simply shape the world nor are they simply shaped by it. Rather, people as well as things are made as more or less 'human' through the 'cuts' that they both make and are made by. Inspired by the work of physicist Niels Bohr, Barad is concerned to highlight the ways in which instruments of observation have a constitutive effect on the world under investigation. Yet this is not a constructivist move in the conventional sense. Rather, Barad's work invites an approach that recognises the 'more-than-human' co-constitution of people, places and things. Translating her thought for a consideration of humanitarian engagements with discarded migrant belongings therefore prompts a consideration of the ways in which 'the human' forms a 'cut' and instrument of analysis, the effects of which need to be critically unpacked.

In this article I draw on the insights of Barad as a means to analyse 'the human' as a political stake in contemporary struggles over migration or mobility. That is, I approach 'the human' as produced through struggles to de/value people, places and things, and thus as a category that is subject to contestation as well as to processes of de- and re-composition. I not only explore the ways by which the category of 'the human' is contested through humanitarian activist engagements with discarded migrant belongings. So also do I examine how 'things' and 'places', as well as 'people', play a key role in the politics of mobility across the Mexico-US Sonoran desert. In so doing, I argue specifically for an analysis and practice that rejects the lure of 'naïve humanism' and the problematic over- and

under-investments of migrant (and indeed human) agency that such an approach involves. This is important, the article claims, in order that the multiplicity of ways by which 'the human' is made, unmade and remade is accounted for without assuming either the supremacy or the powerlessness of people. Throughout the article I seek to draw on, contribute to, and raise questions for existing analyses of the politics of migrant belongings, while also situating the analysis in the context of a range of broadly 'posthumanist' analytical concerns. As such, the article aims to highlight the specificity of a Baradian analysis in terms that demonstrate the significance of multiple contestations and re-configurations of discarded migrant belongings as struggles over the very category of 'the human' itself.

The article proceeds in three parts. The first section demonstrates the importance of the Sonoran desert for an analysis of humanitarian politics, and in particular for what I tentatively call a post-humanitarian politics in which people, places *and* things are engaged in contestations over mobility. The Sonoran desert is a key site for contemporary struggles over migration, while the discarded belongings of migrants have featured as key objects through which migration is contested. A consideration of the significance of humanitarian struggles over things at this site is thus timely and politically important. The second section develops a more detailed assessment of the ways by which humanitarian engagements with discarded belongings contest processes of dehumanisation through the re-configuration of 'desert trash' or 'deserted trash' (hereafter desert/ed trash). In particular, I reflect on humanitarian artistic interventions that re-constitute discarded belongings as indicative of the humanity of migrants. I argue that these ultimately risk invoking a 'naïve humanism' that rests on problematic over- and under-investments of migrant agency in which humans are assumed either as supreme or powerless. The third section of analysis focuses on three alternative post-humanitarian engagements with discarded migrant belongings that I suggest invite a more nuanced understanding of the intra-actions of people, places and things: a legal case regarding the placement of water bottles on a nature reserve, a project documenting migrant artefacts, and the cross-border recycling of migrant belongings. I suggest that these interventions demand a reading of post-humanitarianism as a politics of multiplicity that mark the Sonoran desert as a site whereby contestations over the category of 'the human' are enacted through things.

HUMANITARIAN POLITICS AND THE SONORAN DESERT

The Sonoran desert is an important site for an analysis of the contested politics of mobility (Squire, 2011). Cut through by the Mexico-US border that has been under construction since the mid-1800s (Nevins 2002: 1-46), the desert covers the southwestern parts of the US state of Arizona, the southeastern parts of the US state of California, and the north of the Mexican state of Sonora. To the west it wraps around the northern part of the Gulf of California and borders on the Peninsular Ranges. To the north and northeast, it borders on the Mojave Desert and the Colorado Plateau. To the east and southeast it merges with

mountain forests, while to the south it merges with subtropical forestland. The desert is not only split between nation-states and drawn into US-Mexican borderlands. So also is it composed of a variety of military sites, wildlife reserves, private ranches, indigenous lands and detention facilities, to name but a few. The Sonoran desert in this regard is a complex and diverse site, but over recent years has become increasingly marked by the intensification of border control as well as the intensification of humanitarian activism. Indeed, the desert is a site that highlights the precarity of what we understand to be human life, and allows us to see how 'the human' moves into and out of being through the intra-action of elements that are material/physical as well as social in their formation. This section thus explores the ways in which the Sonoran desert both shapes and is shaped by socialphysical forces or materialdiscursive dimensions, in diverse ways.

The intensification of border control

The forces of US border control that have emerged across the Sonoran desert over recent years reflect the 1994 Southwest strategy, the aim of which was to make crossing borders illegally so difficult that fewer migrants would attempt the crossing (Nevins 2010). Otherwise known as 'prevention by deterrence', this strategy sought to shift migrants away from urban crossings and toward more remote areas that would render the journey less appealing for those migrants seeking to enter the US (Sundberg, 2008: 873-4). Not only have such developments rendered migrant crossings less appealing, but so also have they rendered them more lethal as migrant deaths have increased over recent years (Burridge, 2009: 79). This is a point to which Roxanne Lynn Doty draws attention in her discussion of the migratory journey following the strategy of 'prevention through deterrence':

...crossing the border without authorisation now became an extremely dangerous proposition in which death lurked in every new migrant crossing route, through formidable mountain ranges and along desolate, heat-scorched desert lands.

(Doty, 2011: 605)

Doty goes on to describe the 'raw physicality' of environments such as the desert as having an inherent power, which is mobilised by social and political power in terms that mask the workings of the latter. This, she indicates, is evident where migrants are classified as dying from 'natural causes' such as "extreme heat, dehydration, thirst, or exposure to the elements" (Ibid: 607). What Doty highlights here is an insight that a range of scholars have noted: that the physical forces of the desert have increasingly been mobilised as a means to control migrants over recent years, particularly through the strategy of 'funnelling' those travelling without authorisation through remote and dangerous terrain (Rubio-Goldsmith et al., 2006; Shellabarger et al., 2012; Sundberg, 2011; Vanderpool, 2003). While a more-than-human approach conceives human attempts to fully mobilise or master the environment as ultimately impossible, Doty's analysis nevertheless importantly demonstrates the ways in which the physical forces of the desert are adopted as a 'moral alibi' by which the US state seeks to evade responsibility for such deaths.

Indeed, increased numbers of US Border Patrol agents have rendered the Sonoran desert a formidable environment for migrants to cross over the past decade. While numbers fluctuate, in 2012 there were nearly 20,000 border patrol agents in the southwest region of the US (Miller, 2012). Border Patrol divides the US-Mexico border into different control sectors, which allow for the strategic positioning of officers. For example, the Tucson sector where I was located for my research stretches the furthest distance across the desert environment of all Border Patrol sectors in the region. It runs through the eastern side of the Sonoran desert, spanning 262 miles between the Yuma County line and the Arizona-New Mexico state line. It has become one of the busiest sectors in 'migration traffic' from Mexico to the US over recent years. It has also become an environment that is increasingly shaped by the struggle to control migration. There are checks not only at the borders, but also on main roads leading from ports of entry (Muller, 2013). Border Patrol stations are scattered throughout the remote desert landscape, in order to facilitate off-road patrolling. The *Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act* of 2005 made as a priority the construction of nearly 700 miles of fence across the southern border with Mexico (see Brown, 2010; Dear, 2013). While this legislation did not pass through the Senate, the *Secure Fence Act* of 2006 nevertheless put this plan into action, drawing on the 2005 REAL ID Act to waive existing legislation in order to prioritise the construction of the physical barrier at the border.¹ By March 2012, Homeland Security had erected all but 14 miles of the proposed fence, which includes new solid pedestrian fencing and vehicle barriers along the southwest border from California to Texas, as well as replacement fencing in key crossing points or border towns such as Nogales. In addition to physical sections of the fence, virtual fencing through cameras and lighting has been developed as a means of surveillance, which complements the more recent, though limited, use of overhead drones. Perhaps more accurately described as an incomplete patchwork of barriers, the border fence is often conceived of as an expensive symbolical gesture, yet also brings to bear an obvious materiality – albeit one that does not always operate as its designers planned (see Sundberg, 2011).

The intensification of humanitarian activism

Humanitarian activism has become particularly important in the context of intensified border control across the Sonoran desert. US Border Patrol has itself paradoxically taken on a 'humanitarian' role in light of the increasing numbers of migrant deaths, with selected officers being provided with extra training to protect those whose lives are put at risk by the forces of border control (see Williams, 2011). My focus here, however, is on the activities of voluntary groups engaging in humanitarian activities across the desert, in particular the work of No More Deaths and the Samaritans. During two field trips to Tucson (Arizona, US), Nogales (Mexico/US), and the surrounding areas in May 2011 and May 2012, I joined members of these groups in their activities, as well as informally speaking with and more formally interviewing various humanitarian activists from the groups on both 'sides' of the border.² It is important to note that each of these groups are mixed, including people from diverse backgrounds as well as people with different politics. While members of the Samaritans group are

predominantly Caucasian, retired, Christian, and settled in Arizona, for example, my participation on desert hikes with the group included people in their twenties as well as people originating from Central America. No More Deaths is a notably a 'younger' organisation comprised largely but not uniformly of 'people of faith', and is more fluid with a well-organised volunteer programme that involves people from across the US and beyond. On speaking with a volunteer coordinator during one of my visits, for example, differences between younger and more established members was noted in terms of different perspectives on what humanitarian politics means in the context of US-Mexico border struggles. Indeed, such differences are clearly manifest in terms of the stated aims of the two groups, with the Samaritans developing an aid programme at the border based on compassion and with No More Deaths a group seeking to uphold human rights. The diversity of these groups is thus contextually significant for the analysis developed here, and points to the importance of unpacking the multiplicity of contemporary humanitarian politics.

Not only are humanitarian activists diverse in terms of their background and politics, but so also are they involved in a range of activities. For example, the Samaritans offer support on the Mexican side of the border town, Nogales, by donating practical items such as toothbrushes once a week to migrants at a local 'soup kitchen' run by a religious group. Participants of this group routinely supply food, medical supplies and clothing on both sides of the border to migrants. Similarly, No More Deaths provide support to migrants in Mexican Nogales such as free telephone calls, which at the time of my first visit were provided to migrants at a local bus station. No More Deaths also document border control abuses (No More Deaths, 2011), and organise border camps for volunteers from across the US. In addition, the group has collaborated with a group called Tierra y Libertad to develop a campaign to "normalize non-compliance" against increased state law enforcement powers (Boyce and Launius, 2011). Specifically, it challenges SB1070 legislation that is designed to facilitated the arrest of migrants without papers, and to criminalise those hiring, sheltering or transporting undocumented migrants. This state legislation faced widespread opposition. Most notably at the local level, the 'We Reject Racism' campaign was a visual and community protest involving the creation of 'protection networks' throughout the city of Tucson in Arizona (Ibid; see also Loyd, 2012). The pioneering of this campaign by the Anglo-humanitarian activist group No More Deaths, alongside the barrio-based organisation Tierra y Libertad, reflects the increased criminalisation of undocumented migrants and humanitarian activists not only at the border, but also internal to US state territory over recent years. These developments are linked to increased migrant activism, as well as in citizen and migrant mobilisations of both a moderate and more 'radical' character (see Fernandez and Olson, 2011). The politics of humanitarian activism in this regard has multiplied and intensified over recent years in light of the proliferation of border and immigration control initiatives both across the desert and internal to US territory.

In this article I am concerned with the interventions of humanitarian activists as these pertain to the struggles of migrants crossing the Sonoran desert directly, which is the primary site of my analysis in this article. While various authors

have importantly exposed the significance of migratory and humanitarian politics across the 'extended borderzone' of Arizona (Boyce and Launius, 2011; Fernandez and Olson, 2011; Loyd, 2012), my concern is with exposing the significance of humanitarian politics as these are played out across (though necessarily also beyond) the Sonoran desert itself. This is a focus that authors such as Andrew Burrige (2010) and Juanita Sundberg (2008, 2011; see also Sundberg and Kaserman, 2007) have importantly opened up to analysis. Yet my reason for this focus is not only to show how dehumanisation serves as the flip side of border militarisation (Loyd and Burrige, 2007). So also is it to show how attempts to re-humanize the discussion of immigration and the logic of enforcement can involve dangers of its own. This is not simply to indicate that any strategy of re-humanisation needs to be coupled with a thorough problematisation of border enforcement, which is an argument that has been convincingly developed elsewhere (Burrige, 2009). It is more precisely to problematise strategies of re-humanisation that render migrants 'human' without unpacking 'the human' as a category in the first place. Taking the 'things' that migrants leave behind in the desert as a starting point for my analysis, I seek to consider the political significance of various humanitarian engagements with 'objects of trash' in relation to the ways in which they critically intervene the contested politics of mobility across the Sonoran 'borderzone' (Squire, 2011). Specifically, my focus here is on the ways in which these engagements can be understood as struggles over the very category of 'the human'.

DESERTED BELONGINGS AND THE DE/RE-HUMANISATION OF MIGRANTS THROUGH THINGS

To take as an analytical starting point discarded migrant belongings is not to overlook the importance of people, nor is it to suggest that things are necessarily of particular importance in their own right. Rather, it is to suggest that an analysis of 'desert/ed trash' can shed important critical light on the ways that the politics of mobility involve a struggle over the category of 'the human' itself. This is a form of analysis that has been pioneered by Juanita Sundberg, who explores the close encounters of citizens with mundane belongings left behind by migrants in the desert. Focusing on different representations that both foster and shape such encounters, she demonstrates how the "intimate frontiers of geopolitics" are produced through narrative expressions and spatial practices that either generate or disrupt naturalised imaginaries of 'us' and 'them' (2008: 871). Sundberg focuses in particular on nativist renderings of such objects as 'trash', and shows how this involves a racialising discourse in which migrants are seen as 'trashing America'. This, she argues, makes invisible the effects of border control, and in particular the injuries caused to migrants through their 'funneling' through the desert (2008: 874; 887). Sundberg thus points to the ways in which the articulation of migrant belongings as 'trash' involves a normalizing process in which the bodily comportment of migrants is deemed inappropriate (2008: 877). This is corroborated in part, she suggests, by the attempts of humanitarian groups such as Humane Borders to legitimize their practices by 'cleaning up' after migrants (2008: 880-882). Yet Sundberg also suggests there is a more disruptive enactment of migrant belongings by

humanitarian activists, specifically in the efforts of artists to re-humanise migrants through identifying the intimacy of the objects left behind. Sundberg shows how artistic projects not only induce sympathy to the migrant plight, but can also foster empathy through depicting migrants as simply needing particular items to travel as any 'regular American' would. This play of de- and re-humanisation is also one that I found in my analysis of the politics at play around de/serted migrant belongings, as we will see below. However, rather than privileging the moment of re-humanisation, as Sundberg would at times subtly appear to do in her analysis, I want to go further in problematising the very act of re-humanisation itself as reliant on a conception of 'the human' that requires further unpacking.

My return to the struggles over discarded migrant belongings that Sundberg's analysis has pioneered might be justified in part by an emerging concern with the political significance of 'objects' or 'things'. For many scholars of politics and geography, objects are no longer conceived of as 'matters-of-fact' with an indisputable empirical reality (Latour, 2004). For some, objects mask social relations through processes of objectification and fetishization (Shaw and Akhtar, 2012). For those of a distinctly Latourian bent, objects are enrolled in human/nonhuman assemblages, whether as actants that have a force in themselves or as intermediaries within a wider distribution of power (see Meehan et al, 2013:8). Key for Actor Network Theory (ANT) scholars is that objects or things can be understood as "fully-fledged participants in diverse arrangements" (Hawkins, 2009: 184). Going further, object-orientated scholars focus on the force of objects in their own right (Meehan et al, 2013). 'New materialists' (see Coole and Frost, 2010) also pay attention to the political significance of the 'vitality of things' (Bennett, 2010), while stressing the 'more-than-human' formation of worlds (Whatmore, 2006). Rather than conceiving objects as discrete entities or as secondary to subjects, the emphasis of much of this scholarship is on the co-evolved nature of 'humans' and 'nonhumans'. Thus, such scholars recognize the world "...not [as] a slab of substance from which humans go about inventing objects", but instead approach objects and subjects as existing on the same ontological level and as differing only due to the effects of power (Meehan et al, 2013).

There are significant resonances between the works outlined above and the approach adopted here, most notably in the mutual emphasis on the co-constitution of what I refer to as people, places and things. However, my aim is not to raise the status of 'objects' to nonhuman actors with 'vitality' worthy of investigation in their own right. It is not that I wish to suggest that the vitality of matter is insignificant, rather I find such a focus problematic in both theoretical and political terms. Theoretically, an analysis of nonhuman matter in particular relies on the assumption of a human/nonhuman distinction, and thus arguably does not adequately take on board the insights of Barad that this divide is the result of a materialdiscursive 'cut'. Politically, an emphasis on the vitality of things or the efficacy of matter is difficult to justify and sustain without an emphasis on people in a context that is marked by significant numbers of migrant deaths each year (Squire, forthcoming b). My first move here is therefore to challenge the tendency to assume 'the human' and 'the nonhuman'

as categories from which to undertake analysis, the latter of which Latour only resorts to for 'lack of a better term' (cited in Meehan et al, 2013: 8). My second move is to highlight the significance of exploring how various engagements of migrant belongings involve complex and differentiated intra-actions of people, places and things. Specifically, this provides a means to consider how humanitarian engagements with migrants' discarded belongings can be assessed, precisely in terms of their effectiveness as struggles that shed light on those processes of dehumanisation through which the significance of migrant deaths becomes downgraded.

The focus here is thus on exploring the significance of the becoming and unbecoming of discarded migrant belongings in their formation to *and* transformation from 'objects of trash' (see also Gregson and Crang, 2010). This concern reflects recent moves in the analysis of waste to consider processes of dematerialisation, as well as materialisation (see Gregson *et al*, 2010).³ Materialist analyses of waste remind us that things can change or morph, but do not disappear; a material fact that Gregson et al (2010) attribute to the second law of thermodynamics. The ways in which discarded migrant belongings are devalued as waste is thus not simply a social or representational process, but also a material one; a process that involves physical forces such as the bleaching of the sun and damage by the sand in the desert, as well as the social forces such as nativism that concern analyses of a more constructivist leaning. Importantly, these forces can also be transformed into processes of re-valuation, through the enactment, amplification or intensification of some forces over others. By adopting a materialdiscursive analysis of the intra-action of (mutually constitutive) social and physical dimensions of this process, I seek to analyse the making and unmaking of 'objects of trash' as significant not only in understanding the de- and re-valuation of things, but also of people.

The wider significance of a materialdiscursive analysis of the making and making of 'objects of trash' thus relates to the critical analysis of the category of 'the human', which I understand here partly in relation to the modern constitution of order. Mick Dillon (1998) addresses waste in his discussion of the figure of the refugee, a figure that is heavily racialised through tropes of pollution and dirt (see also Haddad, 2007; Sundberg and Kaserman, 2007). He suggests that waste can be understood in the context of modernity both as an invention to produce order as well as an element that is destabilizing of modern order, the international system and the sovereign subject that this invokes (Dillon, 1998: 33-4; see also Moore, 2012). Waste on this reading can thus be understood as a border concept, which destabilises the relation between 'subject' and 'object' and both provokes affective anxieties as well as inviting ethical reflection on how to live (Hawkins, 2006). This implies that 'human subjects' are intimately related to the production of 'objects of trash' - both in the sense that it is people who are conceived as producing waste and also in the sense that the production of waste destabilises the very order on which the category of 'the human' rests. I thus now want to examine the ways in which de/sorted migrant belongings are made and unmade as 'objects of trash'. In so doing, I suggest that the category of 'the human' is retained as a problematic assumption in strategies of re-humanisation that do not adequately distance themselves from the lure of naïve humanism and

the problematic assumptions on which this rests.

Desert/ed 'Trash' and the Dehumanisation of migrants through things

As long as migrants trek thorough the desert, trash, too, will be a reality.
(Gerbner, *Arizona Daily Star*, 2 May 2011)

The environmental impact caused by illegal immigration, and the trash left behind, is increasingly being found in areas that are more fragile and remote.
(Arizona Border Trash website)

"Sometimes weird things bring people together", suggests Marisa Gerbner of the *Arizona Daily Star*, speaking to the headline of "Cleaning trash left by crossers unites groups". Volunteers, prison inmates, land and wildlife conservationists, the Federal Bureau of Land Management, Congress, student conservation groups, temporary workers, the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality and Humane Borders come together both practically and ideologically, she suggests, to clear the trash that is left behind in the Sonoran desert primarily (if not solely) by undocumented migrants. To suggest that clearing trash brings people together, however, is to overlook the separations that such activities also bring to bear. As Juanita Sundberg and Bonnie Kaserman (2007) argue, the association of trash or waste with the "leaky" bodies of Mexican border crossers features as a racialised expression of the American identity, which is naturalised through a tying of the national imagination to protected areas of natural beauty or significance. Far from unifying, the designation of migrants deserted belongings as 'objects of trash' can be understood as a highly divisive process through which migrants are objectified and constituted as less than human. This process of dehumanisation is related to what is perceived as the disregard of migrants for the desert environment, with their abandoned belongings conceived simply as waste or litter, thus implying their failure or inability to act in a 'civilised' manner (Ibid.).

Image 1: A water bottle discarded in the Sonoran desert

So what precisely are the things that are left behind by migrants in the desert, and why might we want to develop a materialdiscursive analysis of such 'objects of trash'? First, there are water bottles. Many water bottles, usually empty, large as well as small, transparent as well as black. The water bottle in the picture above is one that has been bought over the border by a migrant in order to sustain his or her body on the journey across the desert. Counterintuitive though the black water bottle might initially appear to one unaccustomed to the Sonoran borderzone, there is logic to this unusual packaging – albeit one that is somewhat misplaced. One humanitarian activist that I was trekking with in the desert told me that the glinting of the sun off clear water bottles was a concern to migrants in terms of their visibility to border patrol, and so it became a habit to soil or stain the bottles to prevent this from occurring. Apparently a water bottling industry recognised an emerging market, with an enterprise in the town of Altar, Mexico, producing large black bottles of water to sell to migrants preparing for a long journey across the desert. Ironically, this can be a

counterproductive move in the context of heat sensing border detection technologies, with the water also simply becoming too hot to drink in the daytime desert environment (Neustadt, 2013). The intra-action of different material elements (the sun, heat sensing technologies, black plastic) and social elements (US border patrol, consumer capitalism) here is indicative of the need for a materialdiscursive analysis such as that which Barad's work facilitates. Drawing on the insights of Sundberg and Kaserman, it is my contention that such analysis needs to extend beyond a conception of the production of 'trash' in order to chart the processes of dehumanisation and de-composition through which people, places and things become co-constituted as de-valued subjects-objects-environments.

That migrants who travel across the desert need copious amounts of water is clear, as is the need for them to discard empty bottles as they continue on an exhausting journey. In this regard there are numerous empty bottles near to migrant paths across the Sonoran desert, an issue that has led to significant controversy over recent years. To conceive these discarded water bottles simply as 'objects of trash', however, is to overlook the struggle that migrants engage through the very process of discarding bottles across the Sonoran desert. I will return to a consideration of water bottles below, but first it is important to note that these are not the only things that migrants leave behind in the Sonoran desert which are deemed to be 'objects of trash'. So also are a variety of discarded belongings left in the desert conceived as such. For example, the backpack in Image 2 is one that we found in the desert when I joined humanitarian activists from the Samaritans on what some of the participants called a 'trash hunt' with near Diamond Bell ranch, Arizona. As the crow flies, this ranch lies about 15 miles south west of the city of Tucson and 35 miles north of the US-Mexico border. There were various items left behind with this backpack, including half-full water bottles. This led the activists to suggest that Border Patrol had most likely suddenly disturbed migrants carrying these items.

Image 2: A backpack discarded in the Sonoran desert

Not only are rucksacks discarded in the desert, but so also are a variety of personal belongings. This is described in quite vivid terms in an extract from my research diary, which I wrote on the evening after I participated in the so-called 'trash hunt':

A bit more exploring, off track (though tracks are not clear in this part of the desert), and we stumble across a large mass of what the activists call 'trash'. I estimate it is about twenty meters squared, a mixture of old and new 'trash'. Along the way we have seen quite a few backpacks and water bottles, but not like this. Everything is bleached out in the desert – all the 'trash' is the same colour, grey-blue, washed out, and full of dust. This stuff is the same, but also includes lots of fresh and bright colours on the top. Newer backpacks, newer clothes... Toothbrushes; deodorant; washing powder; cheap yet solid backpacks. Food wraps, beautifully

embroidered. Empty water bottles, black and translucent. A leather belt. Children's shoes, warped by the sun. Sanitary towels. Underwear; jeans. Black bin bags. So much stuff. Fresh garlic – to keep the bugs and creatures away...

As this entry describes, migrant belongings are often piled in a heap, most likely at a pick up point where coyotes guiding migrants across the desert ask (or demand) that migrants leave behind anything that will identify them as migrants (see Image 3). As one of my interviewees explains:

...we think that people would walk the trail North, they'd hide out there, they'd wait for the car, or SUV or whatever, to pick them up, on Arivaca Road, and the coyote would say: 'alright you've just been walking through the desert for like a day and a half, let's try and look like we weren't; so everybody brush your teeth, put on your deodorant, put on your extra set of clothes that we told you to bring and drop all your shit right here, 'cause we're gonna pack as many of you into this Ford Expedition, or whatever, as we can'" (Interview with humanitarian and environmental activist, May 2011: 9).

Worth noting in the diary extract above is that the description implies a play of forces that are not simply of a social nature. Physical forces associated with desertification clearly come into play here: the sun and the dust wash out clothes so that they quickly lose their colour and value. Moreover, the socialphysical forces of coyote and border patrol come together in this situation to prompt migrants to quickly let go of belongings that they have carried with them for many days, even weeks or months, thus vacating their personal value in a moment. In other words, the constitution of migrant 'trash' is not simply a social process involving the construction or representation of people and things as value-less or out of place. It is also a material, or what I call a materialdiscursive process, through which 'people' as well as 'things' are effectively devalued through their abandonment in the harsh desert environment (Squire, forthcoming b).

Image 3: Discarded belongings left at a 'drop-off' point in the Sonoran desert

The status of humanitarian activism in this context is open to question. As both Sundberg's analysis and the article in the Arizona Daily Star indicate, for some humanitarian activists clearing trash is the means for legitimising humanitarian work – albeit with problematic consequences. Yet while trash hunting is by no means the primary aim or activity of humanitarian activists, I suggest it is an important activity in shedding light on the multiplicity of humanitarian politics. For some activists, 'hunting trash' is part of the 'detective work' that allows them to get a better understanding of migrant routes as well as of the nature and characteristics of migrants and their journeys. For many, this detective work has a more practical application – namely locating the best places to leave food and water for migrants crossing the desert. How far my presence as a researcher impacted on the ways in which activists engaged with the discarded belongings is questionable, but when questioned about the potentially derogatory term

'trash hunt' it was clear that some participants were more comfortable with the term than others. What was highlighted explicitly to me was that the aim of the 'trash hunt' is to locate the discarded belongs of migrants and map these using handheld GPS (global positioning system) devices. Activists took care to tell me that this information was used to track migrant routes, explaining that this would ensure that food, water and clothing provisions are left for migrants in appropriate locations. Although the 'trash hunt' on a representational level involves a language that reflects the wider dehumanisation of migrants through the labelling of their discarded personal belongings as objects of waste, aspects of 'the hunt' can therefore be understood as linked to strategies of re-humanisation, albeit those that I suggest are problematic on various counts. It is to a consideration of humanitarian art that I want to now turn in order to consider some of the problems of re-humanising migrants through things.

Humanitarian Art and the Re-humanisation of Migrants through things

It is helpful in considering the strategy of re-humanisation through art to highlight a key aspect of Sundberg's (2008) argument: that encounters with the intimate objects of undocumented migrants not only replays a nationalistic imaginary, but also opens up possibilities for its contestation through the forging of connections between undocumented migrants and American citizens by highlighting their points of similarity (Sundberg 2008: 883-6). Along these lines, Sundberg draws attention to the ways that a collection of migrants' remnants of daily life, sponsored by the humanitarian group Humane Borders, serves as a means to "conjure individual images of human beings with families, hopes and dreams" (2008: 882). This reflects a similar strategy to that of humanitarian artists such as Debbi McCullough and Valerie James, who challenge the constitution of migrant belongings as 'trash' by bringing out their tragic human dimensions in their artwork. Even water bottles can take on new meaning here. For example, James is reported to have "made a pair of shrines out of discarded water bottles, dangling the jugs in their homemade burlap carriers on branches in a corner of the gallery--a somber variant on the Christmas tree" (Regan 2007). Such artistic interventions are clearly critical in exposing the violence of contemporary border control, as well as in making visible the plights of those whose humanity is denied through the articulation of their discarded belongings as 'trash' and their behaviour as 'less than human'. Yet, as Sundberg implies, they can also involve problematic power relations, such as in the production of sympathy through humanitarian art (2008: 886). I want to go further, however, to suggest that even if power relations are equalised through an empathetic appreciation of migrants as simply human, 'just like us', there remain political problems in the process of re-humanisation that such interventions overlook. Specifically, I suggest that this is the case for any strategy that does not thus resist the lure of a 'naïve humanism' in order to interrogate the particular rendering of 'the human' that this assumes.

Crucial though humanitarian interventions are in challenging the violence of border control and processes of dehumanisation, I suggest that efforts to re-humanise migrants effectively risk reproducing the logic of dehumanisation that they attempt to overturn. For example, migration often appears in the

production of humanitarian art as a romantic and tragic tale of dislocation, separation and even death. Valerie James' recent artwork might be interpreted as departing from this emphasis in part by bringing to the forefront the raw and mundane materiality of the border crossing experience, such as through exposing the ripped and dirtied jeans left behind in the desert (Neustadt, 2013). However, her work also represents migrants as human in particular ways – often as vulnerable to dehumanising processes, as idealised 'humans' that are treated unfairly, or even as typical 'humans' who are enrolled in the capitalist system. Thus, James' work presents migrants as vulnerable women (women raped in the desert), as loyal family members (mothers waiting for news of migrating partners or children), or as global consumers (people buying the same bags as 'us') (Ibid.). While there are many reasons why it is critical to expose these dimensions of the migratory experience, my concern is also that this strategy does not adequately reject the logic on which dehumanisation rests. Do artistic interventions such as these not risk confining the migrant experience to the violence that humanitarian artists strive to counter? What I seek to draw attention to here are the dangers of falling into what might be called a 'naïve humanist' strategy of re-humanising migrants, which while important in contesting processes of violence and dehumanisation also potentially play into the very logic that such a strategy seeks to counter.

There appears to be both an understatement and an overstatement of migrant subjectivities in some humanitarian interventions, which I find troubling. On the one hand, the preservation and artistic enhancement of discarded migrant belongings risks *overstating* migrant subjectivities, in particular presenting them as representative of an idealised form of humanity. Migrants here, it would seem, are romanticised as those struggling to meet the needs of their families (as well, perhaps, as the hopes and dreams of all those who invest in their struggle). On the other hand, strategies of rehumanisation also appear to involve an *understatement* of migrant subjectivities. That is, they effectively reduce migrants to a humanity which is denied, without adequately bringing to bear the political interventions that migrant struggles over mobility involve. In this sense, a strategy of re-humanisation would seem to fail, since it rests on problematic over- and under-investments of migrant agency in which humans are assumed either as supreme or powerless rather than as embroiled in struggles that are both messy and difficult. By contrast, I therefore suggest the need for an analytical engagement of 'the human' as a political stake, which maintains an appreciation of the co-constitution of people, places and things. My argument is that such an approach is important because it appreciates the ways that different materialdiscursive 'cuts' enact people, places and things in multiple ways without necessarily assuming the supremacy and/or powerlessness of people. In the next section I develop this conceptual approach further by briefly examining three diverse post-humanitarian engagements with discarded migrant belongings. My claim is not that these engagements are *necessarily* politically different to the humanitarian artist interventions discussed above. Rather, I suggest that they invite a more nuanced understanding of the socialphysical forces that are involved in the co-constitution of subjects-objects-environments as 'desert/ed trash', and as such potentially facilitate an understanding of post-humanitarian activism in terms of a politics of multiplicity.

MULTIPLE CO-TRANSFORMATIONS OF 'PEOPLE', 'PLACES' AND 'THINGS'

Before further examining the multiplicity of a politics of post-humanitarian activism, I want to turn once again to the work of Juanita Sundberg in order to highlight some conceptual matters that are significant for the analysis developed here. Sundberg's early work is critical in addressing the ways in which migrants are dehumanized and re-humanised through different representations of deserted belongings. Nevertheless, her analysis of desert/ed trash ultimately remains focused on the register of geopolitical imaginaries. This is a register that Sundberg's more recent work moves away from, through the development of a political ecological posthumanism that explores the role of nonhuman actors in practices that generate and contest border enforcement (Sundberg, 2011). Focusing on the ways in which geopower involves the properties, energies and potentialities of nonhuman actors, specifically through their inflection, disruption and obstruction of border enforcement, Sundberg provides a sophisticated analysis of the ways that different human/nonhuman collectives shape and disrupt developments in the field of border enforcement. Similarly to the analysis here, Sundberg shows how the Sonoran desert itself is both enrolled in yet also exceeds human calculation as an instrument of border enforcement (2011: 322-323). In particular, Sundberg analyses the desert in its sociohistorical configuration, as well as in its biophysical dimensions (2011: 323-325). Moreover, she shows how collectives with group members that are animal and environmental, as well as human, play a role in shaping geopolitical processes of boundary making (2011: 328-332). This, she argues, allows for an understanding of how specific practices and associations allow wider forces such as nativism or neoliberalism to be analysed through historically and geographically specific sites and bodies (2011: 332).

Clearly the analysis developed in this article has much in common both with the focus of Sundberg's earlier work, as well as with the focus and conceptual concerns of her political ecological posthumanism. However, I seek to highlight some subtle yet significant differences here in order to differentiate between a Baradian 'more-than-human' approach and alternative posthumanist analyses of contemporary border struggles. In particular, I want to shift away from a focus on human/nonhuman collectives to emphasise the significance of understanding how the mutual constitution of humans-nonhumans to which Sundberg refers demands a critical reconceptualization of processes of dehumanization and re-humanisation. To clarify, I am initially concerned here more with processes of separation, or materialdiscursive 'cuts' (Barad, 2003, 2007), than I am with the formation of human/nonhuman collectives. To emphasise these 'cuts' is important, because it allows us to problematize categories on which we uncritically rely. Thus, such an emphasis is more effective in problematizing the dichotomous rendering of human/nonhuman that many posthumanists paradoxically re-inscribe. This also allows for an approach that strives to show how such distinctions only have a meaning that is politically, normatively and materially inscribed through processes of separation that need to be interrogated. Rather than simply showing the desert to be historically and geographically shaped (Sundberg, 2011: 323-325), the analysis in this article

thus works from the assumption that people, places and things are co-constituted through intra-acting physical and social forces (or what I call sociophysical forces). This is important, I suggest, because it forces consideration of the significance of the desert environment and discarded migrant belongings in relation to processes of de- and re-humanisation that cannot derive from any pure or pre-existing conception of 'the human'.

I thus depart from Sundberg's earlier analysis of discarded migrant belongings in various ways. I draw on, yet reframe, the key questions in Sundberg's earlier article, to engage a materialdiscursive analysis of the ontological implications of different enactments of migrant belongings. Sundberg asks: "what do people do with them [discarded migrant belongings]? And, what do their (re)arrangements in the landscape say about how citizens and undocumented migrants, 'us' and 'them', are being imagined?" (2008: 877). The analysis in this article similarly examines what is 'done' with the things that migrants leave behind in the desert. However, it addresses the role that sociophysical forces play in making and unmaking these as 'objects of trash', and considers the implications of such processes in relation to the co-constitution of 'border objects', 'border subjects' and 'border environments'. Thus, rather than considering how the [re]arrangement of objects in the landscape reflect particular imaginaries of 'us' and 'them', I seek to consider the co-constitution of objects-subjects-environments at an ontological level. My aim here is not to invoke an ontological politics beyond representation, which I do not conceive as possible (see Squire, forthcoming a). Rather, I seek to interrogate the sociophysical co-constitution of people, places and things. Drawing inspiration from Barad in particular, I seek to account for processes of separation as well as association, complementing a focus on durable collectivities with an understanding of how these break down and multiply. Barad's emphasis on onto-epistemological 'cuts' across intra-acting (mutually constitutive) materialdiscursive elements in this regard is helpful in critically examining how 'the human' is constituted as a political stake.

This paper thus does not enter directly into a debate about who or what counts as 'human', but instead takes as a point of departure the more-than-human suggestion that it is not possible in any simple way to assume the human subject, either with or without agency. I question the very category of 'the human' by considering how this is made, unmade and remade through struggles over mobility across the Sonoran borderzone. This is not to do away with people, nor is it to de-value the importance of human life (however this might be defined), which would lead in quite a different direction from the analysis developed here. Rather, it is to caution against an approach which gestures toward humanity without thoroughly problematizing the notion of 'the human' and unpacking the assumptions on which such a category rests. To accept that we are always 'more than human' (Metzger, 2013) suggests the need for an understanding of how precisely specific 'people' come to be constituted as more and/or less so. In this section I thus reflect on the significance of some alternative enactments of migrant belongings in this light. I do so specifically in order to reflect on the constitution of alternative 'realities' of the Sonoran desert; specifically those that rely on a transformation of objects-subjects-environments in terms that neither overstate nor understate migrant subjectivities while engaging 'the human' as a

political stake.

Humanitarian water bottles

Let us briefly now return to the water bottles, discussed above. Whether or not water bottles are best understood as 'objects of trash' is a matter of debate. Indeed, this has been a topic of considerable controversy over recent years. In 2008 two humanitarian activists were stopped and cited by federal law enforcement officers while dropping water for migrants on the land of a wildlife refuge in the Sonoran desert. They were later arrested on the charge of littering, and the case went to district court. Although the activists were charged, ambiguities regarding the definition of 'garbage' led to a protracted discussion regarding the conviction. Andrew Burridge notes in his discussion of the Millis case that the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, in a 2-1 vote, overturned the earlier conviction of littering because it "was found that the bottles used to distribute water did not meet the definition of waste..." (2010: 34). Significant in this case for the purposes of this article is that the defence argued that the individuals could not be charged with littering because the items deposited had a use value and were thus not 'trash'. As one activist who I interviewed told me, the message the defence lawyer made was that:

"...this is not littering, this is life saving water that saves the lives of people who are forced here by inhumane border policies and [who] are continually dying" (Interview with humanitarian and environmental activist, May 2011: 4).

Here, we can see how the criminalisation of humanitarian activists who support migrants to cross the harsh desert terrain provides important openings for an alternative enactment of water bottles as objects of value. Drawing on the insights of a more-than-human approach, I suggest that what is important in this case is that it also involves a struggle for the re-valuation of the lives of migrants, thus invoking the category of the human as a political stake that is subject to contestation. Migrant subjectivities are not so much over- or under-invested in this case as they are mobilised in terms that provide an alternative 'cut' through which to define 'the human', specifically by questioning the ways in which some lives are under attack by inhumane border policies. This re-conceptualisation of 'the human' is not necessarily in *tension* with the re-humanising strategies of humanitarian art, but it is indicative of the multiple politics of post-humanitarian activism and the 'multiple realities' that they enact (Mol, 2002). It is multiplicity that the next example of post-humanitarian politics also indicates as significant: humanitarian artefacts.

Humanitarian artefacts

The scholar Jason De Leon leads *The Undocumented Migration Project* at the University of Michigan, which is a project that aims to use different anthropological methods to understand in historical perspective the "clandestine process" of migration across the Sonoran desert (De Leon, cited in Rodriguez 2012). Specifically, this entails an examination of the things that migrants leave

behind, along with the cataloguing of their GPS coordinates, the dates that they were found, and photographs of the objects. The aim of the project is to curate migrant belongings for exhibition as items of historical significance, thus sharing the stories of migrants not only in the US but also in Mexico, potentially developing this as a means to return the things left behind to the place from which they come (Ibid). *The Undocumented Migration Project* is thus not so much an intervention that dwells on whether migrants qualify as 'human', as it is one that engages migrants through their belongings in terms that seek to locate and preserve evidence of different experiences of the migratory process. This is conceived of as important in documenting the daily struggles of migrants across the US-Mexico 'borderlands' (De Leon, 2012). Yet the project indicates that these experiences are multiple even though most migrants simply seek to make the journey in the shortest time possible (Xu, 2013). For example, the preservation of women's underwear from a 'rape tree' documents the Sonoran desert as a place of abuse and violence against women, while the preservation of an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe from a shrine documents the Sonoran desert at a place of spirituality. Of course, there is clearly a risk that this project could fall into the lure of a 'naïve humanism' that over- and under-invests in migrant subjectivities (e.g. if it documents migrants simply as disempowered victims of abuse or as supreme spiritual beings). However, my suggestion is that it can also be understood as engaging a post-humanitarian politics through enacting diverse onto-epistemological 'cuts' that partake in multiple enactments of objects-subjects-environments that re-make and re-value things. That is, the analysis here points to the multiplicity of humanitarian politics in terms of their multiple effects, where the multiple enactments of things also involves multiple enactments of people and places. The re-valuation of things is also an important move in the final case of post-humanitarian politics that I will examine here: humanitarian recycling.

Humanitarian recycling

It is in light of an emphasis on the co-constitution and mutual transformation of subjects-objects-environments that I want to return to the humanitarian 'trash hunt' once again. My interest here can, I hope, be exemplified through a consideration of another extract from the same research diary entrance cited in my earlier discussion of the activity. This reads as follows:

...B collects the items that are new enough to be worth keeping. It seems somehow intrusive to kick these things around and to look inside them. There seems almost a glee to the 'hunt' that that I find disturbing. "Why take them?" I ask. "What do you do with them?" P answers: "We take them, wash them, and reuse them". "Recycling", I say. "But why, what for?" "Sometimes we come across people who need packs to carry the water and food we give them", he says. Later someone tells me that many items that are washed are taken over the border to Nogales and distributed to migrants who will take the difficult journey across the desert. Suddenly I recall handing out socks on the street on the Mexican side of Nogales...

For me, what is of interest in this diary entry is the re-cycling of migrant belongings that humanitarian activists discover on the so-called 'trash hunt'. This involves a re-valuation of migrant belongings that is qualitatively different from the process of valuation that is granted to such objects through humanitarian art, and even that which occurs through the re-making of desert/ed trash as humanitarian artefacts. Recycling does not entail a process of re-humanisation marked by an overinvestment and/or underinvestment in migrants subjectivities. The re-cycling of migrant belongings neither constitutes migrant subjects as idealised humans nor as humans that suffer a loss of their humanity at the hands of forces of control. Rather, it forges connections or associations between different subjects-objects-environments in ways that transform 'people', the 'places' through which they pass, as well as the various connections that they forge. Indeed, this occurs through the very transformation of the things that are widely perceived as 'objects of trash' into objects of value.

There are two points worth focusing on here in the act or process of re-cycling discarded migrant belongings, which I suggest may be politically significant. First, the recycling of deserted 'trash' connects migrants in both spatial and temporal terms, cutting across different territorial sites as well as across different stages of passage through an engagement with what appear to be the 'same things' by different people. This renders migration a collective rather than an individualised endeavour, feeds into the spatial complexity of borderzones as sites of struggle over mobility, and transforms 'people' as well as 'things' in ways that create shared value. Connections and associations *are* thus important in this case, because the particular connections in question resemble a migratory 'coming together' in a context that makes solidarity difficult (as we will see below). Second, the act of recycling enacts differentially positioned people not as members of a common humanity, not as common purchasers of commodities, not as family members nor even as those with 'hopes and dreams' (Sundberg, 2008). The connections formed do not invoke an idealised or impoverished sense of humanity. Instead, they remind us that migrants in Nogales are people who require everyday things such as socks and backpacks to render the desert an environment that can be crossed. The materiality of the desert itself is evident in the ways that migrants relate to such items. For example, on handing out socks to migrants in Nogales, Mexico, I recall one man who refused simply to take the pair of socks that I offered to him. Rather, he insisted in going through the bag to search for the *right* pair of socks. Feeling the strength of the fibre at the soles, the frustration of being at the end of the line was apparent in the man's resigned acceptance of an inferior pair of socks to that of his neighbour in front of him. The significance of socialphysical forces – the knowledge of the physical stresses that his body would endure – was clearly part of the calculation of this man in his acceptance of things bought from across the border in support of the journey ahead. The associations forged through recycling can thus be less than ideal even whilst they are politically significant. Crucially for the argument developed here, these connections are not simple evidence of the formation of new collectivities, which would be to risk overstating the case. Rather, they are indicative of a materialdiscursive 'cut' that partakes in a struggle over 'the human' and in so doing transforms subjects-objects-environments, through things.

CONCLUSION

So what is the political significance of humanitarian activist engagements with the discarded belongings of migrants? In this article I have argued that struggles to transform 'desert/ed trash' into objects of value are nothing less than contestations over the very category of 'the human' itself. By focusing on what I have tentatively called post-humanitarian engagements with the things that migrants leave behind across the Mexico-US Sonoran desert, I have suggested the need for an appreciation of the multiplicity of humanitarian politics in terms of their effects. Specifically, I have suggested that different humanitarian engagements with desert/ed trash can be understood as political struggles over 'the human', which enact diverse transformations of objects-subjects-environments and that are thus implicated in the constitution of the Sonoran borderzone's diverse 'realities'.

Distinguishing between interventions that represent the migrant as an idealised or abjectified expression of humanity and those that more thoroughly problematize 'the human' as a category of supremacy or disempowerment, the analysis in this article cautions against a 'naïve humanism'. By developing a 'more-than-human' approach influenced by the work of Karen Barad, I have attempted to highlight the significance of a post-humanitarian politics of multiplicity that rests on an appreciation of the multiple co-constitution of people, places and things. In discussing legal practices of contestation over 'littering', I have suggested that post-humanitarian politics engage 'the human' as political stake by which to highlight lives under attack and that enact a re-valuation of migrant lives through things. In discussing the collection and preservation of humanitarian artefacts, I have argued that post-humanitarian politics involves multiple enactments of subjects-objects-environments through diverse 'cuts' that document the effects of socialphysical forces on daily life. In discussing humanitarian recycling, I have claimed that the forging of new connections through things offers potential for transformational 'cuts' that are nevertheless politically ambiguous.

What, then, is the significance of an analysis that makes the case for the multiplicity of post-humanitarian politics? Certainly, the multiplicity of post-humanitarian politics raises questions about whether humanitarianism is too easily categorised either as a political 'good' or as a political 'bad', rather than as more ambiguous. By developing a more-than-human perspective on multiplicity, however, I have sought here to suggest that the multiplicity of post-humanitarian politics implies the importance of examining transformations that are already underway, not in any grand and teleological sense but in their various partial and ambiguous manifestations. The Sonoran borderzone in this regard is a crucial site by which to examine struggles over 'the human', and transformations whereby subjects-objects-environments are constituted and re-constituted as more or less 'human'. Such an analysis, I argue, demands a re-thinking of the categories on which we so often uncritically rely. Most crucially perhaps, it requires a thorough questioning of the investments that we make when we assume a distinction between the human and the nonhuman.

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¹ Legislation waived included those regulations relating to environmental impact of the fence. This has led to a range of environmental effects, including flooding on the Mexican side of the border and the death of creatures unable to navigate the fence (McDonnell, 2011).

² I travelled around the 'Tucson sector' area of southern Arizona, as well as around Northern Mexico and Arizona state during two 2-week long fieldwork trips during April/May 2011 and March/April 2012. My research was participatory and observational. It involved a range of informal unrecorded interviews with migrants on the Mexican side of the border; informal conversations with various humanitarian and indigenous activists on both sides of the border, as well as with officials on the Mexican side of the border; and a range of semi-structured qualitative interviews with participants from a range of activist groups across Arizona.

³ Waste has become an increasing area of interest for analyses influenced by the 'materialist turn', which are concerned with the ways in which waste 'bites back' (see Gille, 2007: 28-34).